

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1-18 (Cancelled)

19. (New) A method for managing an independent supply chain, comprising:
in a supply chain comprising independent suppliers, independent distributors, independent stores, and an independent supply chain manager with an independent supply chain manager computer connected together by a network, the independent supply chain manager negotiating on behalf of the independent stores and/or the independent distributors supplier master contracts with the independent suppliers, wherein each different supplier master contract is to supply at least one item to a set of the independent distributors, and negotiating on behalf of the independent stores distributor master contracts with the independent distributors, wherein each of the distributor master contracts requires the distributor to receive items from at least one of the independent suppliers and to distribute the items to a set of the independent stores, wherein each of a plurality of the supplier master contracts includes a term assigning a particular set of the independent distributors to the independent supplier to which to supply the at least one item, wherein each of a plurality of the supplier master contracts sets at least one contract price for at least one item to be supplied to the particular set of independent distributors, wherein each of a plurality of the distributor master contracts includes a term assigning a particular set of the independent stores to the independent distributor to which to distribute the at least one item, and wherein the independent supply chain manager negotiates a mark-up on the items to be distributed to the independent stores;

storing a plurality of terms of the master contracts in a supply chain electronic database accessible via the network;

registering each of a plurality of the independent suppliers, the independent distributors and the independent stores as one of at least three types comprising suppliers, distributors and stores, assigning to each of the plurality a unique identifier based on their

user type, and maintaining a list of registered users in the independent supply chain manager computer;

receiving store sales data from a plurality of the independent stores utilizing the network, the store sales data comprising the sales of the goods by the independent stores, wherein the sales of the goods are made independently of the network;

receiving data from the independent suppliers and/or the independent distributors utilizing the network, the data relating to the sales of the items from the independent suppliers to the independent distributors;

receiving distributor sales data from a plurality of the independent distributors and/or independent stores relating to the sales of the items from the distributors to the independent stores utilizing the network;

electronically translating the sales data of individual goods to items that are components of the goods based on a formula or recipe;

electronically determining an actual landed cost for one of the items based at least in part on the distributor sales data;

electronically determining if the actual landed cost for the item complies with the mark-up negotiated in the master contract by the independent supply chain manager with the independent distributor;

generating an alert if there is non-compliance with the negotiated mark-up;

electronically determining if the price for one of the items supplied to one of the independent distributors matches the contract price in the supplier master contract with the independent supplier for that item;

generating an alert if there is not a match with the contract price for the item in the supplier master contract;

providing an interface on the network to allow access by a registered user on the list to different data in the supply chain electronic database depending on the user type, wherein each of a plurality of the registered users that are independent suppliers or independent distributors has access to the sales data for the stores that they supply either directly or indirectly under at least one of the master contracts.

20. (New) The method as defined in claim 19, further comprising

electronically calculating an actual cost of the individual goods to the independent stores based at least in part on the distributor sales data to an individual store and an ideal cost determined at least in part from a cost of the items used in the formula or recipe to create the goods; and

electronically making this actual cost and ideal cost available to selected supply chain participants based on the unique identifier.

21. (New) The method as defined in claim 19, further comprising:

electronically receiving a request from a user for access to the supply chain electronic database utilizing a first web-page, wherein the request includes the unique identifier, and wherein the supply chain electronic database is updated to reflect current information on at least a weekly basis;

electronically identifying the user as a registered user and determining whether the registered user is one of the independent stores, independent distributors or independent suppliers using the unique identifier;

electronically providing a second web-page if the user is identified as one of the independent stores, a third web-page if the user is identified as one of the independent distributors, and a fourth web-page if the user is identified as one of the independent suppliers, wherein each of the second web page, the third web page, and the fourth web page will extract and display at least some different data from the supply chain electronic database based on the unique identifier that will not be made available on the other web pages.

22. (New) The method as defined in claim 19, further comprising

allowing electronic access to the store sales data via the network to a plurality of independent equipment suppliers that sell equipment used in the production of the goods; and

allowing each of the independent equipment suppliers to make an unsolicited offer to sell equipment to one of the independent stores based on the sales data for that independent store, wherein the offer is not made in response to an auction.

23. (New) The method as defined in claim 22, further comprising determining a charge for access to the independent store sales data by each of the independent equipment suppliers.

24. (New) The method as defined in claim 19, further comprising:
for a goods promotion to independent store customers, the supply chain manager computer automatically obtaining in mid-promotion store sales data from a set of the independent stores;
the supply chain manager computer using sampling to determine based on this mid-promotion store sales data predicted sales for the remainder of the promotion for a group of the independent stores that include at least one independent store that did not supply store sales data; and
generating a communication or making accessible via the network to at least one of the supply chain participants data based on the predicted sales for the group of the independent stores.
25. (New) The method as defined in claim 24, further comprising
automatically generating an electronic order form based on the predicted sales for ordering items from one of the independent distributors or one of the independent suppliers;
and
automatically electronically communicating the electronic order form.
26. (New) The method as defined in claim 19, further comprising
grouping data from independent stores by a store characteristic other than a region and determining benchmark data for independent stores with that characteristic;
electronically comparing the benchmark data to the data for one of the independent stores having that characteristic to obtain comparison data; and
generating a communication or providing electronic access via the network to the comparison data to one of the supply chain participants.
27. (New) The method as defined in claim 19, further comprising providing via the interface on the network a usage estimator for determining for one of the independent distributors or independent suppliers usage of items by the independent stores that it is assigned directly or indirectly under at least one of the master contracts.

28. (New) The method as defined in claim 27, wherein the usage indicator includes an interface to input a growth amount, and calculates usage based in part on an independent store coverage factor and this growth amount.

29. (New) The method as defined in claim 19, further comprising
the supply chain manager computer determining an aspect of supplier performance by receiving an inventory level for an item at one of the independent suppliers that is to be provided to one of the independent distributors under one of the master contracts; and
electronically comparing the inventory level of the one independent supplier for the item to an inventory level of the item at least at one other of the independent suppliers.

30. (New) The method as defined in claim 19, further comprising
the supply chain manager computer electronically facilitating the provision utilizing the network of an electronic catalog for the sale of items to the independent stores that includes an electronic order form, wherein the electronic catalog displays items from a plurality of sellers.

31. (New) The method as defined in claim 19, further comprising
electronically identifying at least one item to be distributed to at least one of the independent stores;
associating a cost model with the item;
determining a time frame during which the cost model is to be valid; and
electronically performing the cost model for use to identify a supplier of the item.

32. (New) The method as defined in claim 30, wherein a plurality of cost models are performed to identify the supplier of the item.

33. (New) The method as defined in claim 19, comprising
the supply chain manager computer forecasting aggregated future sales of a grouping of the independent stores utilizing the store sales data for selected ones of the independent stores; and
the supply chain manager computer providing electronic access utilizing the network to the aggregated future sales of the grouping of the independent stores to at least one

independent distributor or at least one independent supplier aligned directly or indirectly with that grouping of independent stores under at least one of the master contracts.

34. (New) The method as defined in claim 33, wherein the forecasting aggregated future sales of a grouping step comprises the supply chain manager computer parsing the store sales data based on the set of independent stores assigned to a particular one of the independent distributors.

35. (New) The method as defined in claim 33, wherein the forecasting aggregated future sales of a grouping step comprises the supply chain manager computer parsing the store sales data based on the set of the independent distributors assigned to a particular one of the independent suppliers.

36. (New) The method as defined in claim 33, further comprising
generating an electronic order form based on the forecast of aggregated future sales for ordering items from one of the independent distributors or one of the independent suppliers; and
electronically communicating the electronic order form.

37. (New) The method as defined in claim 36, further comprising including in the electronic order form a request to a recipient of the electronic order form to send a confirmation of receipt to a sender of the electronic order form before providing fulfillment of the electronic order form; and

generating an alert if the confirmation is not received by the supply chain manager computer.

38. (New) The method as defined in claim 36, wherein the generating an electronic order form step comprises electronically associating the electronic order form with an item utilizing a web page; and

electronically preventing the item from being associated with more than one electronic order form.

39. (New) The method as defined in claim 20, further comprising

allowing entry of a growth value into a field in one of the web pages; and
electronically calculating a projected parameter associated with one of the supply
chain participants based at least in part on the growth value.

40. (New) The method as defined in claim 19, further comprising
electronically linking each of a plurality of the supply chain participants to at least one
group based on the unique identifier of the supply chain participant and a characteristic of the
supply chain participant; and
automatically providing to different groups electronic access to different data.

41. (New) The method as defined in claim 40, wherein one of the groups comprises
peers, and members in the one group of peers may access to aggregated data from their peer
group.

42. (New) The method as defined in claim 19, further comprising
electronically performing at least one least cost analysis algorithm that includes
parameters of a supplier minimum capacity requirement and a supplier maximum capacity;
and
selecting at least one supplier based in part on results of the performing the least cost
analysis for negotiation of one of the master supply contracts.

43. (New) The method as defined in claim 42, wherein one of the independent suppliers
is excluded from one performance of the least cost algorithm step.

44. (New) The method as defined in claim 42, wherein freight cost is one of the
parameters of the least cost algorithm; and wherein the least cost algorithm is utilized to
determine an optimal product routing.

45. (New) A system for managing an independent supply chain, comprising independent
suppliers, independent distributors, independent stores, and an independent supply chain
manager with an independent supply chain manager computer connected together by a
network, comprising:

a storage medium including a supply chain electronic database accessible via the network storing supplier master contracts with the independent suppliers, the supplier master contracts negotiated by the independent supply chain manager on behalf of the independent stores and/or the independent distributors, wherein each different supplier master contract is to supply at least one item to a set of the independent distributors, and storing distributor master contracts with the independent distributors, the distributor master contracts negotiated by the independent supply chain manager on behalf of the independent stores, wherein each of the distributor master contracts requires the distributor to receive items from at least one of the independent suppliers and to distribute the items to a set of the independent stores, wherein each of a plurality of the supplier master contracts includes a term assigning a particular set of the independent distributors to the independent supplier to which to supply the at least one item, wherein each of a plurality of the supplier master contracts sets at least one contract price for at least one item to be supplied to the particular set of independent distributors, wherein each of a plurality of the distributor master contracts includes a term assigning a particular set of the independent stores to the independent distributor to which to distribute the at least one item, and wherein the independent supply chain manager negotiates a mark-up on the items to be distributed to the independent stores;

a set of processors for implementing the independent supply chain computer that use the storage medium and include among them the following logic elements

logic for accessing a plurality of terms of the master contracts in the supply chain electronic database via the network;

logic for registering each of a plurality of the independent suppliers, the independent distributors and the independent stores as one of at least three types comprising suppliers, distributors and stores, assigning to each of the plurality a unique identifier based on their user type, and maintaining a list of registered users in the independent supply chain manager computer;

logic for receiving store sales data from a plurality of the independent stores utilizing the network, the store sales data comprising the sales of the goods by the independent stores, wherein the sales of the goods are made independently of the network;

logic for receiving data from the independent suppliers and/or the independent distributors utilizing the network, the data relating to the sales of the items from the independent suppliers to the independent distributors;

logic for receiving distributor sales data from a plurality of the independent distributors and/or independent stores relating to the sales of the items from the distributors to the independent stores utilizing the network;

logic for electronically translating the sales data of individual goods to items that are components of the goods based on a formula or recipe;

logic for electronically determining an actual landed cost for one of the items based at least in part on the distributor sales data;

logic for electronically determining if the actual landed cost for the item complies with the mark-up negotiated in the master contract by the independent supply chain manager with the independent distributor;

logic for generating an alert if there is non-compliance with the negotiated mark-up;

logic for electronically determining if the price for one of the items supplied to one of the independent distributors matches the contract price in the supplier master contract with the independent supplier for that item;

logic for generating an alert if there is not a match with the contract price for the item in the supplier master contract;

logic for providing an interface on the network to allow access by a registered user on the list to different data in the supply chain electronic database depending on the user type, wherein each of a plurality of the registered users that are independent suppliers or independent distributors has access to the sales data for the stores that they supply either directly or indirectly under at least one of the master contracts.

46. (New) A computer program product for managing an independent supply chain comprising independent suppliers, independent distributors, independent stores, and an independent supply chain manager with an independent supply chain manager computer connected together by a network, comprising:

a set of computer usable media having computer readable program code embodied among them to be executed by a computer, the computer readable program code comprising

computer code for electronically accessing in a supply chain electronic database via the network stored supplier master contracts with the independent suppliers, the supplier master contracts negotiated by the independent supply chain manager on behalf of the independent stores and/or the independent distributors, wherein each different supplier master contract is to supply at least one item to a set of the independent distributors, and computer code for electronically accessing in the supply chain electronic database via the network stored distributor master contracts with the independent distributors, the distributor master contracts negotiated by the supply chain manager on behalf of the independent stores, wherein each of the distributor master contracts requires the distributor to receive items from at least one of the independent suppliers and to distribute the items to a set of the independent stores, wherein each of a plurality of the supplier master contracts includes a term assigning a particular set of the independent distributors to the independent supplier to which to supply the at least one item, wherein each of a plurality of supplier master contracts sets at least one contract price for at least one item to be supplied to the particular set of independent distributors, wherein each of a plurality of the distributor master contracts includes a term assigning a particular set of the independent stores to the independent distributor to which to distribute the at least one item, and wherein the independent supply chain manager negotiates a mark-up on the items to be distributed to the independent stores;

computer code for registering each of a plurality of the independent suppliers, the independent distributors and the independent stores as one of at least three types comprising suppliers, distributors and stores, assigning to each of the plurality a unique identifier based on their user type, and maintaining a list of registered users in the independent supply chain manager computer;

computer code for receiving store sales data from a plurality of the independent stores utilizing the network, the store sales data comprising the sales of the goods by the independent stores, wherein the sales of the goods are made independently of the network;

computer code for receiving data from the independent suppliers and/or the independent distributors utilizing the network, the data relating to the sales of the items from the independent suppliers to the independent distributors;

computer code for receiving distributor sales data from a plurality of the independent distributors and/or independent stores relating to the sales of the items from the distributors to the independent stores utilizing the network;

computer code for electronically translating the sales data of individual goods to items that are components of the goods based on a formula or recipe;

computer code for electronically determining an actual landed cost for one of the items based at least in part on the distributor sales data;

computer code for electronically determining if the actual landed cost for the item complies with the mark-up negotiated in the master contract by the independent supply chain manager with the independent distributor;

computer code for generating an alert if there is non-compliance with the negotiated mark-up;

computer code for electronically determining if the price for one of the items supplied to one of the independent distributors matches the contract price in the supplier master contract with the independent supplier for that item;

computer code for generating an alert if there is not a match with the contract price for the item in the supplier master contract;

computer code for providing an interface on the network to allow access by a registered user on the list to different data in the supply chain electronic database depending on the user type, wherein each of a plurality of the registered users that are independent suppliers or independent distributors has access to the sales data for the stores that they supply either directly or indirectly under at least one of the master contracts.